

VZCZCXRO3170
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHMO #2618/01 2461239
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 021239Z SEP 08
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9788
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHXD/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 002618

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/02/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#) [RS](#) [XD](#) [XE](#) [XF](#)
SUBJECT: RUSSIA DOWNPLAYS ISOLATION POST-SCO SUMMIT

REF: A. DUSHANBE 1108
[1](#)B. MOSCOW 2600
[1](#)C. BEIJING 3335

Classified By: Ambassador John R. Beyrle for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

[1](#)1. (C) Russia has used the relative silence from countries in Asia and the Middle East regarding events in Georgia, coupled with the "ambiguous" August 28 statement from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), to argue that its recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia has not left it isolated. While some analysts have acknowledged the lack of explicit CIS endorsements as a diplomatic failure, many contend that the GOR understands why governments are taking a cautious approach and are satisfied with the absence of explicit criticism, particularly from U.S.-allies such as Israel, Turkey and Jordan. With Moscow caught off guard by the ferocity of the Western response to its actions in Georgia, the GOR will continue to try to exploit the relative silence from other capitals as support for its concept of Russia holding a prominent position in a multipolar world. Russian officials have already begun their own regional consultations to shore up this support. End summary.

Moscow Muddies SCO Message on Georgia

[1](#)2. (C) Medvedev and certain Russian media outlets attempted to claim that the SCO supported Russian actions in Georgia in the face of the organization's August 28 summit statement that expressed "deep concern" about events in Georgia while also approving Russian attempts to "resolve the conflict" (ref A). Medvedev thanked SCO members for their "understanding" of Russian actions, which the daily Vremya Novosti declared a diplomatic victory of sorts considering the current international situation. Kommersant, however, declared flatly that Russia had "failed to secure support" from the SCO. In an August 31 interview, Medvedev noted the "objective" reaction by Russia's "closest neighbors" to recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. FM Lavrov attempted to explain away Russia's failure by saying that "unlike some of the major Western partners, we prefer that each country think for itself," and accused the U.S. of "scurrilous behavior" by telling SCO member-states how to "formulate" their positions on the Georgia. Kazakh President Nazarbayev's explicit criticism of Georgia for initiating the hostilities - and the U.S. for ignoring this fact - has been played up in Russian media. Kremlin advisor Igor Yurgins noted to the DCM on August 29 that the Russian media deliberately downplayed the emphasis the SCO communique placed on respecting the concept of territorial integrity.

Is the CIS Dead?

[1](#)3. (U) Even before Russia's diplomatic setback in Dushanbe, some Russian analysts pointed to the failure of CIS member-states, with the exception of a reluctant Belarus, to back Russian actions in Georgia as evidence of Moscow's

isolation. Commentator Maxim Shevchenko cited the CIS' failure to play any role whatsoever as a mediator in the Georgian conflict as evidence of the "paralysis and political demise" of the organization once promoted by Russia as a means to retain influence with the former Soviet states. As a result, Moscow not only "lost the right" to claim for itself a special role as "watchdog" of the post-Soviet space, but, left with no allies, had no "vision" of its place in Eurasian or world affairs. This isolated Moscow and increased the chances for future conflict, leading Shevchenko to conclude that the "end" of the CIS was "one of the most important and tragic consequences" of the conflict in Georgia. Another minority criticism was provided by independent internet site Gazeta.ru, which argued that whereas the U.S. was able to gain political support and the assistance of allies for its actions in Iraq, Afghanistan and Serbia, Russia has not been able to present itself as an "example for emulation." Gazeta.ru concluded that Russian isolation was the "logical conclusion" of a foreign policy of "total confrontation."

Don't Expect the CIS or SCO to Act Like NATO

14. (C) Nevertheless, analysts we spoke with were skeptical about the real level of Russia's diplomatic isolation, telling us that "with the exception" of the U.S. and EU states, many countries were not willing to damage their relations with Moscow over Georgia. Alexander Belkin of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy said that the leaders of CIS countries "don't care about Georgia" and were not willing to risk alienating the West by supporting Moscow, or

MOSCOW 00002618 002 OF 003

vice-versa. He argued that the CIS leaders did not see any benefit to getting involved in a conflict whose outcome they could not influence. Moscow understood their position, and was disappointed only in the lack of a response Belarus and Kazakhstan, although both eventually came around to provide some notional support.

15. (C) Many in the analytic community have attempted to make a virtue of the independence of Russia's partners, while downplaying the importance of the CIS as an institution. Contrasting the CIS member-states, which did not see a need to come to Moscow's defense, with the response from certain NATO members that typically leap to support Washington, Belkin argued that the CIS countries were not intimidated from charting their own course.

16. (C) Both Gennadi Chufrin, Deputy Director of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, and Georgiy Mirskiy of the Institute of Higher Economics, explained that the Russian leadership had determined that the utility of the CIS had passed and Moscow would seek to influence capitals bilaterally on Georgia and other issues, as Medvedev attempted to do on the sidelines of the SCO meeting in Dushanbe. Chufrin, who criticized the CIS as being "even less than a talking shop," advised the GOR to form a "regional nucleus" consisting of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, the two countries Russia could convince to support it on Georgia, while seeking to make the SCO a more formidable organization. Dmitry Danilov, Head of the Department of European Security Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences, similarly contrasted the CIS and SCO with NATO, telling us that neither was "a Russian monopoly" oriented toward Moscow the way NATO was toward Washington. The member-states made "pragmatic" decisions not to involve themselves in a conflict that was clearly shaping up to cause a major rupture in Russian relations with the West.

17. (C) Whereas Russia was prepared to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while maintaining a "principled stand" on Kosovo, analysts acknowledged that fear of a Kosovo precedent tempered the actions of others. Chufrin posited that what drove the lack of a CIS response to Georgia was the fact that

many of the member-states faced their own separatist problems. Rather than rush to support Moscow, they chose to "wait and see" how the situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia would play out, and how the result could impact their own separatist regions. China's cautious approach to the issue demonstrated that Beijing sought to balance its concern with territorial integrity with its partnership with Moscow (refs B and C).

Russia is "Too Big" to be Isolated

18. (C) Chuftrin argued that the silence coming from Asia regarding the Georgian crisis demonstrated that Russia's relationship with key countries such as China and India would not suffer. The status quo would also prevail with smaller countries that wanted to expand economic ties with Russia, which is simply "too big" to be isolated. Yevgeniy Satanovskiy, President of the Institute for Middle East Studies, made a similar argument regarding Russian ties with the Middle East. While Syria's Assad might rush to Medvedev's side in an attempt to reap benefits from a public embrace of Russian actions in Georgia, the measured response from Israel and silence from moderate Arab states was more telling about the future of Russian relations with the region. When the leader of U.S. stalwart Jordan was willing to appear with Medvedev on the heels of Assad and make a token pledge of humanitarian aid to South Ossetia, it was clear that Russian ties would not suffer.

19. (C) Both Chuftrin and Satanovskiy pointed to Turkey's independence from the U.S. line on Georgia, noting that Ankara proposed including Russia in the new Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform while the crisis was still unfolding. Chuftrin went so far as to predict that Turkey, with its large Abkhaz population, would determine that it was in its own interests to recognize Abkhazia's independence. Mirskiy said that Moscow was confident that in the end even European countries would not isolate Russia for long because of its ability to influence energy markets.

Comment

10. (C) Russia will continue to spin the absence of criticism from Asia and the Middle East as implicit support. Russian sensitivity to international criticism can be seen in its efforts to shore up regional backing, with Putin in Uzbekistan, Lavrov in Turkey, and the Armenian President

MOSCOW 00002618 003 OF 003

invited to Moscow for consultations.
BEYRLE